

**"THE TRAGIC MUSE."****ORIGINAL STUDY OF A GREAT PICTURE.**

During his recent tour through England in search of bibliographical rarities, J. W. Bouton discovered and obtained possession of what he believes to be the original sketch of Sir Joshua Reynolds' famous picture, Mrs. Siddons, as "The Tragic Muse." This splendid work has a world-wide fame among artists and connoisseurs, and is familiar in nearly every community through the fine engraving of F. Hayward, an impression of which is found in every private and public collection of any note. The proofs of the authenticity and genuineness of the study recently brought here by Mr. Bouton seem to admit of no question. Every detail of its history from the time it left the artist's studio up to the present is clear, and apparently satisfactory. On its face it shows "the peculiarities of color, technique and composition characteristic of Sir Joshua Reynolds; and even the cracking of the paint, which has taken place in nearly all his works, is present in this curiously interesting study, just as it is in the great work of which the study was the forerunner.

The scopic will naturally put it down as a copy made by some imitator of Sir Joshua; but there are several details about the sketch itself which forbid this conclusion. A copy always brings out the most salient and obvious details of the original. The sketch lacks this characteristic entirely, and in many respects is totally different from the finished picture. It is clearly an experiment, and many things that were merely hinted at here, are carefully worked out in the completed canvas. Differences which would not have been permitted by a copyist are seen in the form of the chair on which the actress sat, the clouds under the footstool and the folds of the robe, the pose of the head, and the position of the arms. The sketch also lacks the remarkable signature of the painter on the hem of the robe, which he said was sufficient for him to descend to posterity by. These and other details, together with the authentic history from the engraver, Hayward, prove conclusively that the original study of "The Tragic Muse" has found its way to the United States.

James Boaden, in his *Memoirs* of Mrs. Siddons, says of the work: "Sir Joshua had here a difficulty; he had to combine portrait with mythology, the woman with the muse. Had he intended the latter merely, the substance of the dress would have been more solid, and contained fewer small parts; as he blended the characters, the materials are of modern usage, and the forms alone exceed the dignity of the actress's toilet. The figure retires a little to the left side, the right arm depending over one arm of the massive chair, the left, raised on its elbow, resting on the other. The kind of expression given to the face, which is very beautiful, seems an abstraction of tragedy; contemplating its essence rather than its forms. Its effects rather than its properties. Its ministers attend behind in the Aristotelian states of Terror and Pity; the first advances trembling with the bawl of acutis, the second drops over the reverend dagger. The turbid atmosphere, while it sustains, accords with the figures to which it adds its elemental strife only less dreadful than the war of passions. Sir Joshua inscribed his name and the date, 1784, on the hem of the garment, as borne to posterity by Mrs. Siddons. I am happy to say that the number thus given is never likely to be severed, for though the picture must one day perish, the engraving of Hayward may be renewed forever."

An even better idea of the work and interest of this work is found in "The Life and Times of Sir Joshua Reynolds," by Charles Robert Leslie, R. A., and John Taylor, where the following account is given of the sitings for this famous picture: "Mr. Russell, author of the 'History of Modern Europe,' had sung her praises, under the title of 'The Tragic Muse,' before she left London" (after her first great success in the metropolis). "His verses are forgotten, but they may have suggested to Reynolds the subject of his picture . . . In a letter to Dr. Whalley, written from Dublin in July (1783), he says: 'I have sat to a young man of this place, who has made a small full-length of me, as Isabella, upon the first entrance of Birion. You will think this an absurd undertaking, but he has succeeded to admiration. I think it more like than any I have yet seen. I have little doubt that, by sitting to him during the month of October, and continuing into the spring of 1784, in the exposition of which year appeared this, the most example probably of truly idealized portraiture, in which we have at once an epitome of the sitter's distinction, calling or trade, and the technical expression of all the real form and features are capable. In the quality of color, as far as the head, bust, and arms are concerned, the picture ranks with the very best of the master, and is a credit to his preservation. The composition of this noble work was no doubt suggested by Michael Angelo's Isabella, Mrs. Siddons told Mr. Phillips that it was the portrait of pure beauty. Sir Joshua, however, was not in a position to sit for it, and was occupied in the preparation of some color she changed her position to look at a picture hanging on the wall of the room. When he again looked at her, and saw the picture, he had requested her not to move; and thus arose the beautiful and expressive figure we now see in the picture."

The study has already been seen by many leading critics, and it is not improbable that it will soon have a place of honor in the foyer of one of New York's finest theatres.

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